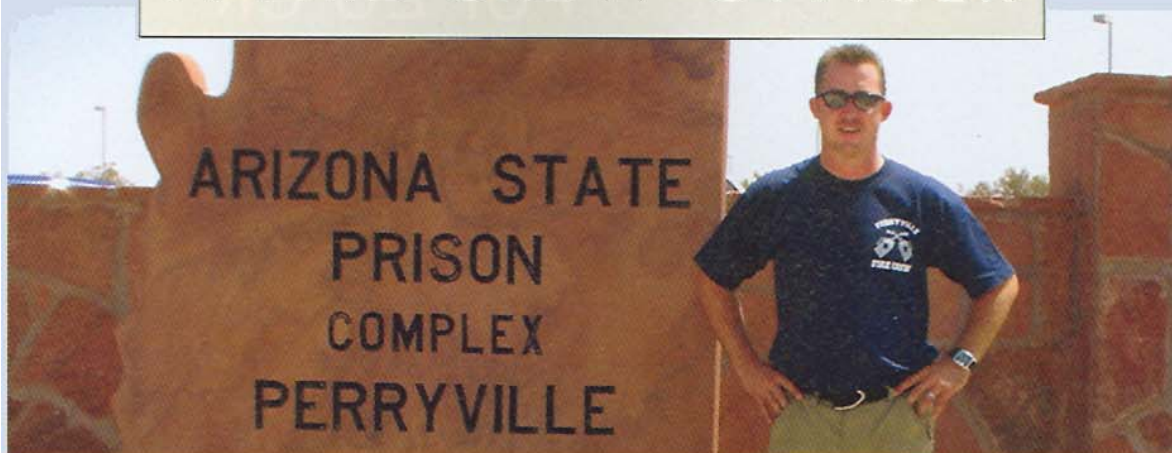


FROM THE MOUTH OF...

A FIRE CREW OFFICER



Jamie Wade isn't just a sergeant at the Arizona State Prison Complex in Perryville. He's also a firefighter.

Wade is part of the Wildland Fire Crew, a division of the Arizona Department of Corrections that helps inmates give back to the community by teaching them how to fight fires.

When Wade sold all of his possessions and randomly hopped a Greyhound bus from upstate New York to Arizona 10 years ago, he had no idea where he'd be today. But Wade's experience as a logger in his home state made him a perfect fit for the fire crew.

"I'm a sergeant in the Arizona Department of Corrections. I represent the prison in Perryville. We coordinate a 20-person female inmate fire group. We go anywhere in the state and put out the wildland fires.

"We have a lot of support from the department. They work really hard to get these crews up and running. The inmates make \$1 an hour fighting fires. That's good pay for inmates. It's a physically demanding job. There's a lot of stuff – training that you have to go through, certifications. You have to be in good physical condition to do this kind of work in the heat, sometimes 110 to 115 degrees, and your clothing doesn't breathe at all. You carry anywhere from 45 to 60 pounds on your back in a backpack.

"We work side by side with anybody out there. We work around the other institutions, ones that have male inmates. We

treat everyone like firefighters out there.

"It gets you outside of the prison.

Prison is such a negative environment. Any time you can get out it's positive for everybody. It makes them enjoy the work that much more. They feel like they're giving back to the community and doing good things.

"It's dangerous, but it's a controlled environment for the most part. There are a lot of good people in place – people who have been around fire. It's a science where, if it's that dangerous, you don't send hand crews in there. Then, they use planes and helicopters. You don't send a crew somewhere where you don't think they can get out.

"We've been to four fires already this year. Just got back and now we're getting everything ready to go again. May, June, July and August are the busiest months. But we fought in February, too. In season, we could see anywhere from 12 to 15 fires. Some crews that I know of see up to 38 fires per year. It depends on the season.

"When we're not fighting fires, we do project work. We do brush abatement work in the Prescott area. We go to a lot of the Bible camps and kids camps and clear out the brush around the camps so they can defend structures from wildland fires. We go just about every week. Trying to give back to the community gives inmates a peace of mind that they can actually save the camps."

— Interviewed by Tara Brite